

Peasant-Proprietorship in India.

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DVILADAS DATTA.

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"The Rayat is India, and India is the Rayat, but in these stormy days the still small voice of the Rayat is drowned in the political whirlwind," says Mr. Hamilton, in speaking of the manufacture of "Souls of a good quality." Ever since the sovereignty of India passed into the hands of the East India Company, "creating the astonishing position, that a few commercial agents were handling the revenue of a kingdom in the name of an emperor" (Montagu-Chelmsford Report)," the Rayat who is really India, has been, and still is bled for the benefit of a handful of exploiters and speculators in revenue-farming, for the benefit of those who produce nothing but "wind and dust," famine and pestilence. We have tried to place the case of the Rayat from the remotest antiquity to this day, both before the Public, and before the Legislature, and we presume, we have proved to the hilt, that justice to the Rayat has been long over-due. Have we not a right to hope that after the King Emperor's message of the 9th February,

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1921 promising to Indians "Swaraj within the Empire," and "progress to the liberty which the other Dominions enjoy," have we not the right to expect that justice shall be done to the Rayat at last, to the Rayat who is India? The Royal promise of "Swaraj within the Empire," is a promise to "the many millions of our fellow countrymen who are not yet qualified for a share in political life," to whose "first representatives" at Delhi, the Imperial Message was delivered by the Duke of Connaught. Who are "the many millions" that His Imperial Majesty then held before His Majesty's eyes? Who but the Rayat, who forms 85 per cent of the people? And yet the Rayats are practically unrepresented in the Councils then opened under the new "Government of India Act" of 1919, which promises to the Indian Rayat, progress towards responsible self-Government, as in the other dominions of His Majesty. Take for example, the out-going Bengal Council. Out of a total of 139 members in the Bengal Council, there was not one who could with truth be called Rayat or "India" who could with

truth be said to represent the Rayat who is India, forming 85 per cent of the people. Babu Bhisma Dev Das, a member of the Committee for the Amendment of the Bengal Tenancy Act, justly complained saying, 'I wish to make it clear that there is no real representative of the tenants on the Committee.' The Tenancy Act was proposed to be amended by a Committee on which there was none to represent the "tenancy," the Ramayana was to be acted with the character of Rama left out ! Such has been the justice of the judgements of the so-called "first representatives of the people in the new Councils" on which his Imperial Majesty says, he reposes a "resolute faith". The fact is that out of the 139 members of the out-going Bengal Council, there was scarcely one whom we could look upon as a true representative of the people. Whose representatives then were those 139 members ? There were among them 19 Government officials, 17 non-official Europeans, 39 lawyers, and 35 Zemindars, each representing either himself, or his own section or class, with an axe of his own to grind. These make up 110 out of the 139. The rest are

usurers, Government pensioners, Doctors, &c. Where was there room for the true representatives of the Rayat who is India, forming 85 per cent of the people, whose number in the out-going Council, in the proportion of the population, might have been 118 out of the 139? Babu Bhisma Dev, a dummy member of the Amendment Committee, whom the Zemindar landlords and their patrons in the Council, set up as a stalking horse or a *Sikhandi*, to wear the mask of a representative of the Rayat, had at least the candidness to admit that there is no real representative of the tenants on the Committee. There could not be any real representatives of the Rayat on the Amendment Committee, so long as there were no real representatives of the Rayat in the Councils themselves. How then is the 'upliftment' of the "many millions not yet qualified for a share in political life." to be effected? Will the so-called representatives of the people, the Zemindars, Mahajans, officials, and lawyers, who directly or indirectly victimise the Rayat, or have their own sectional axe to grind, work for their "upliftment," cherishing the interests, of those unqualified millions

as their own" ? Will the leopard change his spots ? Could you gather grapes of a bramble bush ? They scramble to get into the Councils by hook or crook, in their own personal or sectional interest. But are they likely even to raise their little finger for "the training and expansion of the electorate," as the Duke of Connaught, the message-bearer of His Majesty in Parliament, told them, that it was their duty to do, when he opened the new Council for Bengal ?

How then is effect to be given to the wishes of the King-Emperor in Parliament, regarding the upliftment of those many millions ? Or how is their "progress to the liberty which the other Dominions enjoy" to be effected ? Is it too much to be hoped that the official members in the Councils, as the agents of His Majesty, will at least prove themselves worthy of the confidence and "resolute faith" reposed in them by his Imperial Majesty in Parliament, and loyally carry out the wishes of His Majesty in Parliament, "working for the upliftment" of the "many millions not yet qualified," "cherishing the interests" of those many millions, "as their own" and doing all

that they possibly can, for the training and expansion of the electorates ? They should not surely be men with an axe of their own to grind. We therefore hope the official members will justify their presence in the Council of the "peoples" by espousing the cause of the unqualified and unrepresented millions of our fellow-countrymen, the Rayats of India. We know we hope against hope, but shall be glad to find that we are mistaken. We have proved, we presume, that the Rayats have been the absolute proprietors of their lands, from the remotest antiquity, until under the East India Company, "a few commercial agents came to handle the revenues of a kingdom." The Rayat who is India, expects that at least the ministers and agents of His Imperial Majesty of all ranks, will now unite to do all they can, to undo the act of gross injustice done to the Rayat in the beginning of British rule in India, and abolish Zemindaries and *Khas Mahals*, thereby restoring to the Rayat his time-honoured right of absolute property in his own lands, thus bringing India into line with the advanced countries of the world.

COMILLA
The 22nd January,
1924.

Dvijadas Datta.

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